



## CHILD OBSERVATION PROJECT - INUIT TEACHER TRAINING (COPITT)

1979 - 1985

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Paper prepared for Symposium '85 on Inuit education entitled Preserving our Heritage and Preparing our Future through Education.

Kuuujuaq, Northern Quebec

November 1985

July 1986

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## 1.0 COPITT Origins

During the fall of 1978, the Kativik-McGill teacher training program recognized the need for course content dealing with educational testing, diagnosis and assessment. (See What is the Inuit Teacher Training Program?, Kativik School Board, for history of the Kativik-McGill teacher training program up to that point.) McGill instructors such as myself had been offering this content off-campus to practising teachers in various regions of Québec, with some degree of course adaptation to immediate regional needs. I was convinced, however, that needs of northern Inuit educators differed by orders of magnitude beyond any possible adaptations of southern qallunaat material. Perhaps the only value of southern educational evaluation methods and standards might be for older Inuit students eventually wishing to compete in southern educational programs. Very little formal knowledge existed concerning the learning style and pace of young Inuit children, whether being taught in Inuktitut or their second language. I suggested strongly that introducing southern primary-level testing and assessment methods to Inuit teachers would be not merely irrelevant, but possibly damaging, to both their own and their students' progress.

Only an action research approach, beginning with Inuit teachers' observation of their own children's learning and development, seemed appropriate. The proposed approach would involve (a) collaboration among a multidisciplinary group of southern educators, and experienced Inuit teachers and counsellors, (b) trial and error cycles in developing observation methods and interpreting their outcome, (c) direct involvement and training of Inuit classroom teachers as the observers in this action research, (d) immediate usefulness of the observational work to each classroom teacher herself, and (e) later usefulness of accumulated observations in curriculum and material development, in teacher training courses, and in decisions regarding policy, philosophy and style of Inuit education. (See original COPITT proposal, submitted January 1979 to Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec-MEQ). The COPITT project was accepted and funded by MEQ, essentially as proposed, for a 3-year period. Since then COPITT has been supported as an ongoing function of the Kativik School Board.





## 2.0 COPITT Goals

- 2.1 Any effort to monitor educational progress opens the issue of basic developmental goals for children and their school system. From the COPITT perspective, the goals for northern native education are not simply attainment of some "southern standard". The following goal statements are provided to clarify the project's stance within the northern education scene.

### 2.1.1 Competency goals for an educated Inuk child

- a) The child's competence, sense of identity and worth as an Inuk; close links between school, home and cultural community in his education; comfort, enjoyment and best developmental use of his time in school; preservation and extension of his language and culture, and ties with the wider Inuit world, plus
- b) positive integration with qallunaat culture from a position of Inuk cultural strength; wide ranging life choices in education and professions; an awareness, tolerance and capacity to deal with both Inuk and qallunaat cultures.

### 2.1.2 Self-sufficiency goal for the Inuit educational system

The self-determination and self-sufficiency of Inuit educators in operating an educational system to obtain the above competency goals, and others that may evolve.

This goal implies Inuit development in all roles and levels of the system - classroom teachers, specialists, teacher instructors, administrators and planners, researchers - with no more reliance on external expertise than that needed by people everywhere for highly specific skills and information.

### 2.1.3 Cultural-linguistic implications of competency and self-sufficiency goals

Accumulating evidence shows that high degrees of competence and self-sufficiency derive from comprehensive quality native-language education in the early school years. This positive evidence concerns not only first language acquisition and maintenance, but later second language, intellectual and social-emotional development (see Information about language learning..., Arlene Stairs, 1980). Beyond the very salient feature of language, education based on Inuit perceptual skills, thought patterns and values, and social interaction processes is implied. The education of educators as well as of children must consider these culture-specific features of teaching and learning.



2.2 In serving these goals COPITT has a continuing research role, as an integral part of the school system, at four levels.

2.2.1 Direct observational research of Inuit child development in all domains: perceptual-motor, linguistic, cognitive, and social-emotional.

2.2.2 Program evaluation research tied to teaching methods, materials, settings and policies being developed.

2.2.3 Culture-context research concerning the evolution, contact pressures, maintenance and linguistic viability of Inuit culture in Quebec.

2.2.4 External background research concerning other native and minority educational situations in Canada and elsewhere, and communication with these other groups and projects.

Clearly in a small rapidly changing system such as Kativik, only certain aspects of certain levels receive full emphasis at any given moment.

2.3 The ultimate aim of COPITT research is to provide information to those in application and development roles within Inuit education.

2.3.1 Consultants and counsellors designing curriculum, program sequences, materials.

2.3.2 Teachers and specialists assessing student needs and providing special education services.

2.3.3 Administrators, instructors and advisors providing teacher training and degree-level university education for Inuit personnel.

2.3.4 Policy-makers determining language of instruction and educational structures for an Inuit school system.

3.0 COPITT Work Stages, 1979 - 1984

Initial COPITT priorities were determined by Inuit counsellors involved in the project. "Why do our children not read until 8 or 9 years of age, while southern children begin at 6 years? Is it







### 3.0 (Cont'd)

because our language is difficult, or because of the way we teach?" (Betsy Annahatak, 1978). This specific concern led to a general decision at the first COPITT meeting to begin developmental research at the readiness and early primary levels rather than in one specific learning area (e.g., mathematics) across a wide age range.

In the first several years, most progress was made in observation of perceptual and motor skills. The marked strength of visual skills among Inuit children was confirmed, and program developers began building and refining a reading curriculum capitalizing on this strength. From 1981, there was an increasing focus on language acquisition, involving a combination of Inuktitut linguistic study and developmental study of children's language samples from 5 to 12 years-of-age. A hearing-screening project was set-up over the same period to begin coping with the very high northern incidence of otitis media and related learning disruptions. In a less formal way, thinking skills were studied in designing a basic concept scheme for early Inuktitut mathematics. Similarly, study of the social-emotional characteristics, needs and problems of Inuit children began through a course session, prepared and taught by Inuit instructors, for teachers and school counsellors.

From these beginnings with isolated and analytic (piecemeal) study of the child, current COPITT projects as described below (4.0) are moving into more holistic study of the child's relationships to his educational context. We feel this is a shift towards a more Inuit research perspective - perhaps from "Child Observation Project" to "Culture Observation Project". The greatest factor in this evolution of COPITT has been the expanding interest and changing roles of Inuit in educational research, and the consequent shifts in consultant perceptions and methods.

## 4.0 COPITT Research and Development Projects 1985 - 1986

### 4.1 Evaluation of early Inuktitut-first-language education

Systematic evaluation began during the 1984-1985 school year, focussing on children then in grades 3 and 4. These levels include the oldest students who received Inuktitut instruction based on a well-developed language and literacy curriculum for kindergarten and grade 1. Inuktitut instruction has varied greatly among settlements in terms of grade level and percentage of Inuktitut-language teaching, formality of program, and preparation of teachers. Documentation of these school variables, and of other settlement factors such as second language television,



#### 4.1 (cont'd)

population changes, and economic projects, is nearly complete. Writing samples have been gathered from all grade 3 and 4 students and have been analyzed for length and complexity indices established in an earlier pilot study (to be presented at American Speech and Hearing Association, Washington, D.C., November 1985). High correlations were found between these linguistic indices and proficiency ratings by experienced Inuit teachers and counsellors. Rating by 4 Inuit educators is also being done with the current writing samples for further correlational study and development of native-speaker language acquisition categories.

Writing sampling was selected as the top level Inuktitut language skill of interest to educators and communities, but broader study of proficiency, in both Inuktitut and second language, is planned for later in the year. This study would focus on selected settlements and individual cases, and would involve oral communicative as well as cognitive competence in content areas such as mathematics, science, and basic problem-solving (verbal and non-verbal).

#### 4.2 Loss and maintenance of native language and the role of native language literacy.

Documentation is underway concerning loss and maintenance of Inuktitut from west to east in Canada and other circumpolar regions, and of language loss experiences among native populations elsewhere in the world (information to date presented to Arctic Québec communities during Education Services round trip, winter 1984 - 1985). Particular attention is being given to the role of education in the cultural dynamics of native language maintenance. Native language literacy is well-documented as a key factor in language survival, and in both individual development and cultural evolution (see articles by A. Stairs, *The developmental context of native language literacy: Inuit children and Inuktitut education*. In B. Burnaby (ed), Promoting native writing systems in Canada. Toronto: OISE Press, 1985, and *Native language viability and the role of literacy: The experience of Inuktitut in Nouveau-Québec*, Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec, 1985, 15,3).

#### 4.3 Kindergarten screening project

During 1984-1985, developmental screening was carried out for the first time with all Kindergarten children in Kativik schools. This screening was built on the child observation work done in conjunction with Inuit teacher training courses since 1978 (see reports





#### 4.3 (cont'd)

by A. Stairs et al., COPITT Report on Child Observation Data 1979-1982, Section I: Perceptual-Motor Development and Section II: Language Development, Dorval, Kativik School Board 1984). Over the years observation methods appropriate to Inuit children and teachers have been designed and revised, with further revisions resulting from this first comprehensive screening. Kindergarten screening is being repeated this fall and is anticipated to continue in following years. Early identification of children with developmental lags or learning disabilities is a primary purpose (12 children identified in 1984-1985). Results are accumulated and integrated with past years' observation to provide a baseline for subsequent developmental research with Inuit children; to examine settlement differences and historical changes; and to study cultural specifics in perceptual, motor and language skills preceding formal schooling. Screening materials for 1985-1986 are now in the hands of Kindergarten teachers.

#### 4.4 Methods for observing Inuktitut language development and proficiency levels.

Attempts to evaluate Inuktitut proficiency (a language which had not been studied developmentally until the COPITT project began) evolved from (a) a fragmentary psychometric (testing) approach (discrimination, articulation, and receptive-expressive usage items), to (b) a language-sampling approach using conventional linguistic analysis, to (c) an ethnographic (descriptive) approach. Cultural inappropriateness of earlier approaches in terms of content, testing context, and language functions was discovered repeatedly. Currently a major ethnographic study of language acquisition by Inuit children in their home settings is underway (related to Ph. D. thesis project of the COPITT language consultant). Goals of this study are the development of more appropriate language-teaching methods in Inuit schools; more realistic methods for observing language levels, strengths and weaknesses; and some theoretical work concerning accepted language universals which may be confirmed or challenged by the findings. This study will continue for a minimum of 2 years.

In conjunction with this ethnographic work, COPITT is searching for an interested scholar or consultant to continue earlier linguistic analyses using the new language material collected. To date, a children's (5-12 years) glossary of several hundred words has been initiated, and a number of key developmental structures have been identified.





#### 4.5 Professional roles and native identity

Over the past year, the conflicts between (a) increasingly demanding professional roles in the educational system and (b) identity in the Inuk world, have become a highly-focussed concern among Inuit counsellors, consultants and administrators (see paper by B. Annahatak, Thoughts of an Inuk teacher. Education Express, 1985, 1, 2.). Issues involve differences in style and community role for an Inuk and a qallunaaq doing ostensibly the same job; locus of control and decision making; interactive patterns between Inuit and qallunaat; the use of Inuit language and conceptual patterns in originally qallunaat institutions. Background study is beginning concerning mental health problems among Inuit in bridging positions between Inuk and qallunaaq cultures, and concerning professional training programs that have succeeded or failed under various circumstances. Several Inuit counsellors are interested in continuing this documentation work and in beginning interview studies and community observation of these identity issues. This work should begin systematically during 1986 in the form of tutorials or special projects within Bachelor level programs of a few Inuit counsellors. One goal is to work with higher education institutions to design programs appropriate to the existing professional and community commitments and to the learning style of leading Inuit educators. A second goal is to develop professional training within the school system (teachers, counsellors, others) which incorporates Inuit values, social patterns and language, and reduces the culture conflict of those educating the present generation of Inuit children (see Kativik School Board - McGill University Inuit Teacher Training Program, rough draft, 1985).

Three further reasearch and development projects are in planning stages, to begin late in the 1985-1986 year or the following year. The first concerns Inuit concept acquisition and cognitive mapping relevant to the presentation of mathematics and science in the northern schools. This work has been proceeding slowly since 1979 in conjunction with development of a primary Inuktitut mathematics program. More concentrated and systematic study (e.g., verbal and non-verbal classification studies) is now needed. The second project, also in progress but in need of consolidation, is a comprehensive history of COPITT research work, and presentation of the model evolving for educational development in a minority native context. Stages of personnel development, native language curriculum and materials development, and categories of ongoing research are to be documented. The interaction of these components as they determine the role of education in a culture-contact situation is the fundamental concern. Finally, there is interest in the study of Inuit child development stages. Counsellors would explore developmental concepts with adults of various ages, trying to describe an Inuit model of life stages and maturity which they believe exists. This model would serve as an alternative to southern (western) developmental models (e.g., Piaget, Erikson) in guiding some further child observation research.

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